

Cherokee Tragedy: The Ridge Family and the Decimation of a People (The Civilization of the American Indian Series)

Thurman Wilkins

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Beginning with the birth of the Cherokee patriarch Major Ridge in the 1770's, Thurman Wilkins tells the events that led to the Trail of Tears, through the eyes of the illustrious Ridge family. Major Ridge and his Connecticut-educated son John were willing to abandon the rich tribal homelands in North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia and emigrate west to the Indian Territory to escape the white invaders.

During the decades of fruitless negotiations that culminated in the infamous Treaty of New Echota, Georgia, in 1835, the Ridges and their relatives Elias Boudinot and Stand Watie became persuaded that further protests by the Cherokees would lead only to their annihilation at the hands of the whites. The pro-treaty Ridge faction was opposed by fiery John Ross, the leader of the majority National Party, who wanted to stay and fight in the Southeast against all odds.

In this revised edition of his great work, Thurman Wilkins addresses the new scholarship of the past fifteen years and reconsiders the important questions raised by Cherokee history aficionados: Were Major Ridge and John Ridge paid off by the United States for their support of removal? If not, how did these Cherokee patriots come to change their minds about emigrating west? Was Chief John Ross a hero or a villain?

Since Cherokee Tragedy was first published in 1970, it has been valued as a penetrating social and political history of neither the whole Cherokee Nation-nor just the Ridge family- from the last quarter of the eighteenth century to the 1838 Trail of Tears and the subsequent "execution" of the Ridges in Indian Territory.



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